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AUTHOR Cacciatore, Sharen
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ABSTRACT

The Story Train is a non-profit, elementary literacy program dedicated to the development of creative writing and critical thinking skills. Those objectives are achieved through a variety of specific techniques utilized to inspire students. The four components of the program are workshop, residency, television production, and an Internet site. The Story Train brings a writer/author to the students, giving them a face and a reality into the world of writing. The residency component allows the instructor the opportunity of more time with each class. Students in grades 3 through 6 are introduced to the 5 steps of the writing process. For grades 1 and 2, the 4 parts of a story (character, setting, problem, and solution) are introduced and explained. The Story Train television production can be offered in conjunction with the residency or the workshop or as a separate package. The television production showcases some of the young authors and their stories. If their school is connected to the Internet, teachers can integrate The Story Train Internet site in their classrooms to enhance their reading and writing curriculum. The Internet site consists of different "cars" on a train that offer a variety of topics on writing. (RS)

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S. Cacciatore

Sharen Cacciatore

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The Story Train™

The Story Train™, Inc. is a non-profit, elementary literacy program dedicated to the development of creative writing and critical thinking skills. Those objectives are achieved through a variety of specific techniques utilized to inspire students. Creating an environment of excitement and confidence in one's own ability, paves the way for achievement in all academic endeavors. Creating this atmosphere in the classroom is the very first step of *The Story Train™* program.

"The obvious rise in self-confidence and trust in their own ability, has made my students into more enthusiastic writers. They write because they want to, not just for a grade." Mrs. Carol Damon, fourth grade teacher at the Burkland Elementary School in Middleborough, MA.

"This program is a 21st century way to encourage children to write." Mr. Robert Austin, Principal at the Burkland Elementary School in Middleborough, MA.

"High school students today are showing an unfortunate lack of good writing skills. Programs like *The Story Train™* can make a crucial difference in both motivating kids to write and improving their skills as they do." Mrs. Carol Kalchthaler, third grade teacher at the Assawompset Elementary School in Lakeville, MA.

There are four components to this program, but each with the same basic purpose,

to inspire students. The components can either be combined or utilized separately to achieve that purpose. The components are: workshop, residency, television production or Internet connection.

!!!!!!!As a workshop. *The Story Train™* brings a writer/author to the students, giving them a face and a reality into the world of writing. The author shares with the class a short story and then explains how he or she came up with the idea for that story. This brings the whole mystique of being an author down to their level of understanding. It gives life to the story writing process and allows students the confidence to imagine themselves as authors.

Brainstorming a class story is also part of the workshop. This technique allows all the students to communicate and share ideas in an atmosphere of acceptance. Brainstorming begins with one word, from which a main character, a setting, a conflict and a resolution are defined and integrated into a story. A workshop is generally one session per class and a total of six sessions are included in a one day workshop. A workshop could consist of several days. One-day workshops are limited to a reasonable traveling distance.

!!!!!!!As a residency. This component allows the instructor the opportunity of more time with each class. If the residency consists of meeting twice with each class, the first session will be the same as if it were the workshop, but an introduction into and explanation of the five steps of writing will also be included for grades three, four, five and six. The five steps

are: initial idea, first draft, revision, proofread and publishing. For grades one and two, the four parts of a story will be introduced and explained. The four parts are: character, setting, problem and solution. A simple writing or drawing assignment at the end of the first session will be given.

*The second session will be an opportunity to showcase, at random, some of the assignments. Students will be allowed the opportunity of questioning their fellow classmates about the story or drawing. Even though the assignments are chosen at random, only those students who willingly agree to have their work shown will be chosen. No child will be forced to participate, as some children just love watch.

*If a three session residency is chosen without a television production, it will consist of approximately two and one half hours with each class. Once again, the five steps of writing will be introduced. These steps will initially be brought to life by brainstorming a class story which will lead directly into a first draft of their own story. Their first assignment will be to have their draft ready for revision for the next session. For grades one and two, a picture of their main character with a one sentence caption will be sufficient.

*The second session will involve revision of their stories. This is an important technique used for developing their critical thinking skills. To a comfortable degree, the instructor will help the student become objective in reviewing and editing their work.

For grades one and two, the caption must give a specific detail about the main character.

The assignment for the next session will be to revise and proofread their stories so some of them can be chosen at random and read. A total of six sessions per day are included.

!!!!!!!*The Story Train™* television production. This is the ultimate motivator for any student. It can be offered in conjunction with the residency or the workshop or as a separate package. A maximum of 35 students can participate so it could even be offered as a randomly chosen student prize. The purpose of the television production is to showcase some of the young authors and their stories. It is a unique reading, listening, sharing and learning experience for the students as well as for the community. A guest speaker is always invited. The guest is a professional from the community who shares their views on the importance of using imagination and being creative. They relate these views to the students via their own personal experiences. The guest has an important role in the context of what the television production is all about. It serves to reinforce the idea that there is value in being creative, there is value in the ability to be objective and there is value in finishing a project. This production requires an additional 12 hours time with the chosen students.

The Story Train™ ignites in children an understanding and love of writing. It takes

even the shyest students and weakest members of a class and transforms each one into an author, an author of a story that gets noticed.

"The student's eyes light up when it's *Story Train* time, they can't wait to share their stories. *The Story Train™* has sparked something in them - and to think it's on an academic level and they're learning. Nothing could have been given to those children in school that could have meant as much." Mrs. Carol Damon, fourth grade teacher, Burkland Elementary School in Middleborough, MA.

The Story Train literacy program works with schools, teachers, parents and students. It addresses the immediate need in American education to teach children creative and critical thinking skills.

"It is no longer enough for students to simply know the answers on a test. Teachers must now emphasis critical thinking and comparing and contrasting from their students. Mrs. Charlene Bizinkauskas, Middleborough High School special needs teacher.

"In my opinion, *The Story Train™* is a unique idea that provides an excellent opportunity for children to learn. Using the medium of television, The Story Train makes use of all aspects of written and oral language and communication." Dr. Dennis D. Flynn, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools, Freetown/Lakeville Public Schools, Lakeville, MA.

The Story Train™, also utilizes the most modern method of communication available today, the Internet. The purpose of which is to add another path of encouragement and inspiration to students. If their school is connected to the Internet, teachers can integrate *The Story Train™* Internet site in their classrooms to enhance their reading and writing curriculum.

The Story Train™ Internet site consists of different 'cars' on a train. Each 'car' has a name and can be viewed by clicking through each page. The 'cars' offer a variety of interesting topics, all to do with writing.

1. *The Story Train Station*. The home page that lists the different 'cars'.
2. The 'engine car'. Introduces engineer and tells why *The Story Train™* was created.
3. The 'fuel car'. Offers students tips on being creative and gives writing advice.
4. The 'passenger car'. This car presents a story of the month along with a short biography of the author. It gives instructions on how to submit a story.
5. The 'baggage car'. Letters from students appear here. These letters are about being part of *The Story Train™* at their school.
6. The 'caboose'. Final words from the engineer.
7. The 'boring stuff for grown-ups page'. About *The Story Train™*, and how to bring it to your school or university.

Enlisting some, or all of the components of this elementary literacy program is a sure way to excite and inspire students. The Story Train™ is a registered trademark.

My name is Sharen Cacciatore and you may reach *The Story Train™* in several ways.

Write to: The Story Train

 P.O. Box 1372

 Middleborough, MA 02346

or call: 1-508-946-4054
FAX: 1-508-947-8646

on the Internet

connect to: www.ici.net/customers/stytrain

or e-mail: stytrain@ici.net

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SHAREN W. CACCIATORE

DATE SOURCE

THE STORY TRAIN, INC.

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Signature: <i>Sharen W. Cacciatore</i>	PRESIDENT
Printed Name: SHAREN W. CACCIATORE	The Story Train, Inc. (non-profit)
Address: 6 Indian Meadow Road, Middleborough, Mass. 02346	Telephone Number: (508) 946-4054
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